

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

September 2, 2021

Dear Chair Stabenow and Senator Boozman:

We are writing to request your support for Puerto Rico's inclusion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The nearly 90 business, community and advocacy groups signed on to this letter are advocating for the provisions in the Closing the Meal Gap Act (HR.4077/S.2192) that would allow for an orderly transition of the territories into the SNAP program be included in the current budget resolution. These provisions address nutrition disparities faced by American families and children residing in Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands by ensuring that in the face of economic slowdowns, public health crises, natural disasters and rising food insecurity, our fellow U.S. citizens living in the territories have equal access to nutrition aid currently available to the most low-income and food insecure Americans.

Since 1982, U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa have been excluded from SNAP and from receiving the same nutrition assistance provided to other low-income Americans, exacerbating food insecurity particularly during times of great need. Forty years ago, the United States legislated Puerto Rico's participation in the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) through a capped block grant that does not fluctuate or respond to need. From its inception, the block grant was funded at 75 percent of the expected cost of the Food Stamp Program in Puerto Rico, resulting in a harmful 25 percent reduction. To comply with the new conditions, Puerto Rico tightened eligibility requirements and reduced maximum benefits to U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico.

The recent change to the USDA Thrifty Food Plan increases the Puerto Rico nutrition grant, however, it does not create parity with the states, or with other territories like Guam or the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NAP block grant is not need based and under the new TFP guidelines, Puerto Rico benefits will continue to be 25-30 percent lower than SNAP benefits provided in the fifty states. *Tragically, as a block grant and unlike SNAP, Puerto Rico NAP does not automatically increase in times of great need, forcing territorial residents to wait in hunger when emergencies strike.*

Puerto Rico already has demonstrated its ability to transition into SNAP by fully implementing an EBT system, updating technology capabilities, phasing out cash benefits, and training employees. In recent reports, USDA and FNS have positively evaluated Puerto Rico's compliance with FNS regulations, planning requirements, and program monitoring.

Finally, funding provided to Puerto Rico directly impacts U.S. farmers and food producers throughout the 50 states. In 2019, Puerto Rico imported \$6.5B in food and beverage products from the U.S. The island ranks as the second or third-largest importer of U.S. staple agricultural products in the Western Hemisphere, after Mexico and Canada, surpassing countries with larger populations than Puerto Rico. Expanding SNAP to Puerto Rico creates jobs and builds economies throughout the U.S.

The Closing the Meal Gap Act would fix Puerto Rico's unequal treatment under Federal law, help the nation's most vulnerable citizens during times of extreme need, and grow agricultural economies throughout the 50 states. The proposal has the significant support with 91 House and four Senate cosponsors. We are asking you to support the provisions in the Closing the Meal Gap Act that transition Puerto Rico into SNAP by including them in the current budget resolution. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, Director of the Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico at lillianrodriguezlopez@gmail.com or Laura Esquivel, Vice President of Federal Affairs for the Hispanic Federation at lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org who will be able to provide additional information and will be contacting your office directly on this matter.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully submitted by,

Coalition for Food Security and Hispanic Federation

Business Members

ACDET - Puerto Rico Retailers Association

AgroNegocios

B. Fernandez & Hnos, Inc.

Ballester Hermanos, Inc.

Caribbean Can Manufacturing

Century Packing Corp./Carmela Foods

Coca-Cola Puerto Rico Bottlers

Crowley Maritime Corp.

Supermercados Econo, Inc.

Kikuet Foods

Mendez & Co., Inc.

MIDA - Food Merchandising and Distribution Association

Navis

PET Plastics, LLC

Plaza Provision Company

Puerto Rico Coffee Roasters

Puerto Rico Rice, LLC

Puerto Rico Supplies Group

Quirch Foods

SuperMax Puerto Rico
Tote Maritime
V. Suarez & Co.
Walmart Puerto Rico

National Advocacy Organizations

Alianza de Lideres Comunitarios de PR
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
AMERICAN GI FORUM OF THE U.S.
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Coalition on Human Needs
Endeavors
Equally American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network)
Feeding America
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
GreenLatinos
Hispanics in Philanthropy
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of United Latin American Citizens
MALDEF
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE)
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Latinx Psychological Association
National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA)
National Puerto Rican Day Parade
National WIC Association
PFLAG National
Power4 Puerto Rico Coalition
PR University Center on Developmental Disabilities (PR-UCEDD)
RESULTS
SER - Jobs for Progress National Inc.
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP)
The National Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce
Unidos US
ZERO TO THREE

State & Local Organizations

Accion Valerosa, Inc.
Alianza Center
Banco de Alimentos Puerto Rico, Inc.
Centro de Microempresas y Tecnologías Agrícolas Sustentables Yauco Inc. (CMTAS)
Centros Sor Isolina Ferré, Inc.
Coalición de Coaliciones Pro Personas sin Hogar de PR, Inc.
Coalición de Residentes de Vivienda Publica del Área Metropolitana
Connecting Paths PR, Inc
Consejo de Residentes Residencial Luis Llorens Torres Sector Youth Center
Conservación ConCiencia
Departamento de la Comida de Puerto Rico
El Mundo de los Muñecos: Puppet World Inc.
Fundacion Infantil Ronald McDonald of Puerto Rico, Inc. - San Juan, PR
Fundación Música y País
Instituto Nueva Escuela
Movimiento para el Alcance de Vida Independiente
Mujeres de Islas
Mumas Renaciendo Corp.
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico
One Stop Career Center of PR Inc
OPDH
P.E.C.E.S., Inc.
Ponce Neighborhood Housing Services Inc
Puerto Rico Para Tod@s
Red por los Derechos de la niñez y Juventud de Puerto Rico
Salud Integral en la Montaña, Inc.
Sol es VIDA Inc.
Waves Ahead Corp
Y No Había Luz, Inc.